

Refurbishing, Restoring & Repowering

Tri, Tri Again - Rebuilding A Hydrofield Jaguar

After completing and selling my last project boat (a Seafarer Venus – see F&B issue #75), I promised myself that I would not go anywhere another project.

Working every day as a commercial skipper, I reasoned there was no need for me to own my own boat, with its associated costs.

I had been working out of Marina Mirage (on the Gold Coast) for a couple of years, and had gotten to know all the local business owners, and their requirements. Tall Ships Cruises on the Gold Coast run two large tourist sail boats, as well as a water taxi.

The water taxi was a 5.6 metre Hydrofield Jaguar, powered by a 150hp EFI Mercury outboard.

They had not had much luck with this boat. Over a period of six months, they blew the engine up about three times. Due to this and the seasonal work slowing, the boat ended up being left in the water, without an engine, for nearly two years. I walked past the boat every day, knowing deep down what a good boat it could be.

During a Sunday afternoon stroll through the marina, a chance reunion with the owner of this boat led me to ask him questions about it. He advised me that it was still there, and he had no need for it, nor was he interested in rebuilding the engine.

Although I had just sold my Seafarer, I was not really on the look out for another project, but next time I walked past the Hydrofield, I naturally had to jump aboard and have another look . . .

The boat was, well, in a state of disrepair, to say the least.

It sat on the mooring, bow down, because it had no engine, and had a huge amount of growth underneath. Without the clears fitted, all the lounges and carpets throughout the boat were destroyed.



Report, Work & Pics by Darren Shiels

\$10,000. Now, as I knew its history, I told him I was not interested in the engine, and only in the boat, and further any purchase price would be subject to an independent inspection by a qualified surveyor.

I organized for the boat to be towed to Southport Volunteer Marine Rescue, where I was a skipper, and to utilize VMR's 5.5 m Noosa Cat trailer, to pull the Jaguar out for an inspection. I used a 7.0 m Noosa Cat, powered by twin 200hp engines, to tow the boat from the marina to the



Do It Yourself
-with F&B!

It had started life as a Hydrofield Jaguar 5.6m tri-hull. Being an old water taxi, it was originally fitted with lounges and seating for eight, full canopies and clears all around.

As a young guy following the boating industry through magazines and boat shows, I had read where these boats were praised, and seen the video footage of them busting through white water bars. I envisaged that there would be a high demand for these boats, and that they would retain their resale value.

After losing a few night's sleep to thought and conversation with my partner Cathy, I imposed a 7-day "cooling off" period upon myself.

But after a week, the concept persisted, so I approached the owner once again. He told me he would sell it, and without much thought, suggested a price of

slip. Instantly, I felt the weight of the Jaguar. The twin 200hp engines were really struggling to pull it up on plane.

The boat felt over two tonnes, and being engineless, this seemed quite excessive (!!) so we assumed the boat held some water on board. After pulling the boat up on the trailer, and removing the growth infested bungs, the boat was left to drain for around five minutes. My word, did it have some water!

We are lucky El Nino is melting our icebergs down south, because the Hydrofield had stored the rest of the ocean in its hulls! The inspection of the underwater area confirmed it was still a good hull, with no osmosis to be found.

As for the rest of the boat, it was pretty much 'what you see is what you get'. Bad weather deterioration, no working electronics, and all in poor condition generally. There was, however, on the positive side, no structural problems, and due to the boat being built to Survey and a very high standard to start with, the boat itself was still in surprisingly good condition.

I went home and spent another sleepless night pondering the potential of the day. A full budget and time lines were done up. I believed that I could spend around \$25,000 on the boat in total, without over capitalizing. After discussions with my partner and the valuer, I decided to put in an offer of \$4,300 (no engine) to the owner. Without even blinking an eyelid, he accepted. He just wanted to move it on, and was willing to sell the engine separately, so it worked for both of us.

All of a sudden, I found myself the owner of a boat I really didn't need, but I was very keen on the project, and busting to get started.

My first problem was how I would get the boat to somewhere I could work on it, without costing me a fortune. I searched for boat transport people, as my preference was to get the boat to my home where I could work on it every day. My thoughts were that if it was kept on a hardstand somewhere I could use this as an excuse not to work on it, but if it was in my front yard, I had no travelling time, and could work on it within minutes of thinking about it.

My spirits were being deflated by very expensive transport costs (up to about \$400 due to the boat needing to be craned on/craned off) until I found Bronco Transport on the Gold Coast. They had a large flat bed truck that contained its own crane behind the cab that could hold the weight of the boat. He went on to tell me that he had done a couple of these types of transports before, and had a special sling set up for the purpose. It was agreed for a cost of \$60.00 transport to my home from the nearest boat ramp.

Watching the boat being put on the tray, with the fantastic sling set up, it got me to thinking of how much money I had saved by taking the time to shop around and find an expert. It was decided there and then, this would set the tone for the entire project.

As we lowered the boat onto the fifteen or so tyres, the boat looked a very sad sight now that it was out of the water, and it drew many and varied suggestions from neighbours and passers by.

Down to Work And so it began. I started working on the boat the very first afternoon I had it. We spent a good few hours pulling the boat to pieces, and having a really good look at it.

My garage was transformed, as everything from the

internals of the boat were removed, including safety gear, seats, carpet, canopies, radios, electronics, gunwale rubbers and a whole lot of other bits and pieces. I went to the local Big W store to get some very useful cleaning supplies, including degreaser, plastic polish, stainless steel polish, knife blades, mould remover and finally a high pressure water cleaner. I figured that Big W would have the same products for much cheaper prices than my local chandlery.

I set about cleaning the canopies, and working from the top down. I degreased the entire floor and hidden compartments, got rid of all the years of built up oil and soot, and cleaned everything with the gerni.



Once all the internals were removed, I was faced with a huge cockpit. The floor was starting to come up very clean, and I could even see the original flow coated floor. At the end of the first day, although very wet and disgustingly dirty, I was happy with the way the project was progressing.

Now that the boat was in a reasonably clean and workable environment, I started to strip the boat of all its fixtures. I stripped everything. Cleats, vents, aerials, bow rails, gauges, steering, hatches, speakers and all the left over screws that I had found. The old screw holes in the floor and cabin were filled with gel coat putty, and painted over with flow coat. Everything was left to dry and air out for around a week.

During this down time as it aired out, I spent my days off searching the boat yards for a candidate to paint the boat. I had decided to strip the boat myself, and leave the preparation and painting to the professionals.

I searched around and got quotes, but as with home needs, I found that professional contactors are not at all reliable. In the space of about a week, I had organized about five marine painters to come around and quote on the boat. In this week, only two actually turned up.